

CLAIMS OF THE INVENTION

I CLAIM:

1. A bonus system associated with a gaming system including at least one gaming device, the gaming device arranged to present at least one game for play thereon, comprising:

a player tracking device associated with said gaming device, said player tracking device including a card reader, a keypad, and at least one display, said player tracking device configured to receive information regarding said gaming device;

a player tracking host arranged to store data regarding activities of one or more players of said gaming device;

a communications link between said player tracking device and said player tracking host over which information is transmitted; and

a bonus system host, said bonus system host arranged to determine the eligibility of a player to participate in a bonus event, to determine whether an eligible player has won a bonus, and to generate bonus information and transmit said bonus information over said communications link to said player tracking device to a player who has won a bonus.

2. The bonus system in accordance with Claim 1 wherein said player tracking device includes a player tracking controller located at said gaming device, said player tracking controller adapted to execute bonus event instructions received from said bonus system host.

3. The bonus system in accordance with Claim 1 wherein said communications link comprises a portion of a communication network

4. The bonus system in accordance with Claim 3 wherein a plurality of player tracking hosts associated with differing gaming devices are associated with said host.

5. The bonus system in accordance with Claim 1 wherein said bonus event is independent of a specific outcome of a game presented at said gaming device.

6. The bonus system in accordance with Claim 1 wherein said player tracking device includes at least one speaker, said player tracking device arranged to present audible bonus information in response to bonus event information from said bonus host.

7. The bonus system in accordance with Claim 1 including a top box mounted upon a housing of said gaming device, said top box supporting at least a portion of said player tracking device.

8. A method of providing a bonus to a player of a game comprising:

- providing a player tracking device associated with said game, said player tracking device, said player tracking device in communication with a player tracking network permitting transmission of information to and from said player tracking device and at least one host device;
- configuring bonus event information;
- determining if said player is entitled to participate in said bonus event;

if said player is determined to be entitled to participate in said bonus event, determining if said player is a winner of said bonus event based upon one or more criteria for winning said bonus event, said one or more criteria being independent of a specific outcome of said game;

if said player is determined to be a winner of said bonus event, transmitting bonus information from said host to said player tracking device over said player tracking network; and presenting a bonus event at said gaming machine with said player tracking device.

9. The method in accordance with Claim 8 wherein said player tracking device includes a player tracking device controller and at least one peripheral, said at least one peripheral selected from the group consisting of a card reader, display, printer, keyboard and speaker.

10. The method in accordance with Claim 8 wherein said bonus event information is transmitted in response to an indication of a player playing said gaming machine.

11. The method in accordance with Claim 10 wherein said indication comprises the transmission of player identification information from said player tracking device.

12. The method in accordance with Claim 8 wherein said step of presenting a bonus event comprises providing an indication that a bonus has been awarded.

13. The method in accordance with Claim 12 wherein said step of providing an indication comprises generating audible and visible information.

14. The method in accordance with Claim 8 including the step of transmitting bonus event award information from said bonus host to said player tracking device.

15. The method in accordance with Claim 8 including the step of transmitting bonus event award information from said bonus host to said player tracking host.

16. The method in accordance with Claim 15 wherein said transmitted bonus event award information comprises credit information.

17. A method of awarding a bonus to one or more players in a gaming environment comprising the steps of:

determining that a player of a game is entitled to participate in a bonus event;

determining the one or more players who are entitled to a bonus based upon one or more criteria, said criteria being independent of the outcome of a specific game played by said player; and

transmitting information regarding said bonus to said one or more players who meet said criteria at said game.

18. The method in accordance with Claim 17 wherein said step of accepting information regarding an identity of a player comprises reading information from a player tracking card.

[illegible]